

Sparking the desire to understand and abandon self-defeat

REIGNITE

PAUL JUN



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Clarity on how to build your life with one mindful action at a time.
An understanding on becoming your own person.
Abandon self-defeat and start living up to your true potential.

Enjoy.

— Paul



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“I don’t know what it is you really believe in, but I do know what it feels like to be out of place, to be disconnected, to see the whole world laid out in front of you the way other people live it. There is something about you that tells me you know it, too.”

— Mad Men



Introduction

Accountability is a word that I have always heard from my parents and teachers from a young age. In elementary school, I once walked into class without my homework done. As all the other students passed up their work, the teacher noticed that I didn't hand mine in. She kindly asked, "Paul, where is your homework?"

Of course, like any kid who smells trouble, I blamed it on my Mom.

Demonstrating the traits of any memorable teacher, she didn't scold or criticize or embarrass me in front of my peers. Instead, she took the wooden stick that teachers often used to point things out, and tapped on a poster above the blackboard that, to this day, resonates in my mind: "You are responsible for you."

I read the words, but I couldn't quite understand them. I asked her what it meant. She stopped the review and began explaining how we are

responsible for ourselves. "It is easy to blame our shortcomings and mistakes on other people," she said, "but at the end of the day, only you are responsible for getting it done." Not only is this important for school, but also essential in carrying that frame of mind throughout our lives.

It's funny, because now that I think about it, some of the most valuable and profound life lessons were above the blackboard, not on the blackboard: "You are responsible for you," "Don't judge a book by its cover," "TEAMWORK," "Treat others how you would like to be treated."

Like many young students, I overlooked the importance of those messages and focused my attention elsewhere. Now that I have a more clear memory of all these principles, I ponder why these passages were not emphasized in full detail — they, in essence, seemed more interesting than whatever I was learning.



As I entered middle school, those simple words of wisdom were found in all classrooms and hallways, but I ignored them. Once I got to high school, these messages became futile as I had my own interests to worry about. I mean, come on . . . I'm in high school. I'm busy.

Then came college. College was a turning point in my life — not in a sense of great academic achievements and meeting interesting people. Oh, no. I was the complete opposite: I was failing my classes, didn't have any goals or idea of what I wanted to do with my life, and I continuously beat myself up. There came a point where I kept repeating in my head, "What are you so stressed out for? Why are you always so angry and anxious and frustrated? You are capable of so much more, so much success and greatness. What are you doing?" And with a sigh, I would tell myself, "This is not me."

Do you ever feel that?

Now that I was aware of it, how could I deny myself the opportunity to reinvent myself? That awareness, that sudden realization, was the stepping stone to turning my life around.

We can blame school or our parents for not teaching and expanding on those important life lessons — that would be easy. The tough but wise thing to do, as I learned a little too late, is to do what is difficult, and that entails accepting responsibility for one's actions.

An old Chinese proverb says,

"The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago, the second best time is now."

More than ever, we need to stop and take the time to understand ourselves; to not overlook those messages and genuinely understand and embrace them. I'm not saying to drop your life and quit everything you're doing, but it is pivotal to plant a seed for the desire to learn, to understand, and to be the best that you can be, so those aspirations can grow into something fruitful, positive, and life-changing.

This book is about reigniting your self-awareness. It's about reinventing yourself to abandon self-defeat, focus on what matters, and live up to your true potential.



It's about you learning how to be responsible for you.

I am certain that many times we get in our own way of living a fulfilling and remarkable life. We create mental roadblocks that cause us to doubt ourselves, succumb to fear, and be overwhelmed by anxiety. We tell ourselves "I can't," or "it's impossible," and we revel in those excuses. We defeat ourselves because we pay mind to unnecessary provocations. We squander our efforts in meaningless tasks, especially when there are many other matters that are deserving of our attention and energy. All of this is common everyday practice, and not at all within the blueprints of living a fulfilling life.

If you have within yourself the desire to find your own greatness; if you're telling yourself, "No, this is not me. I'm better than this. I deserve more," then you're right. You just need to find the will within yourself to make the change.

That's exactly what I plan to help you do.

Choice is always present and greatness is always an option.

Before you go on

I want to go over a few things:

- You have to be willing to be open-minded about this subject. Most likely, if all goes well, you are going to unlearn much of what you have been practicing. You are going to replace bad habits for better ones. How? By becoming aware.
- You have to believe that your mindset is your most powerful tool. Reading this kind of material restructures your mindset, making you more susceptible to change. You are opening up your receptors, nurturing your mind in new ways; there is much truth in the saying, "You can do anything you put your mind to."
- Like any piece of advice, it is much easier said than done. You can spend a lifetime reading insightful books, but if you fail to take action, then you miss the point. The idea is not to become frustrated when you fail to execute what you have learned, but rather to pick yourself up and do it right the next time — because there will always be a next time . . . and a next time.



- As you become more aware of your thoughts and actions, your self-defeating behavior will become more evident, further enabling you with the ability to facilitate change. This is the stepping-stone. How can a person change their ways if they are unaware of what needs to be change?

I know that you are more than capable of abandoning self-defeat. It is a matter of “I will” or “I won’t.” It is your choice.

The act of reigniting yourself will be a difficult obligation. I believe at one point, we all lose focus on what really matters in our lives. In the midst of this, we start to focus too much on things outside of our minds, when in essence, we should be focusing on ourselves — our behaviors, habits, and well-being. How you perceive things truly shapes your life, as they influence your thoughts and actions.

When you lose sight of yourself and what’s really important, you’re more vulnerable to self-defeat. The hard-truth is, however, once you develop the habit of self-defeat, it becomes difficult to climb

out of that rift just like any bad habit, addiction, etc.

To reignite oneself is to assume the position of fire. Fire would not be fire if it weren’t for persistence and determination to burn everything in its path. The change from the old you, to the new you, is going to require you to dust off the old ashes and to embrace what’s ahead. Many people may relate to fire as destruction. That’s one perspective, sure. You and I would be much better off to view it as a fresh start, a rebirth, a way to radiate and captivate the life that we yearn to live.



“Remember, the saddest thing in life is wasted talent.
You could have all the talent in the world but if you don’t
do the right thing, then nothing happens.
But when you do right, guess what? Good things happen.”

— Sonny, *A Bronx Tale*



Chapter One: Knowledge of Self

“To become different from what we are, we must have some awareness of what we are.” — Bruce Lee

What is self-awareness?

Self-awareness is the condition of being constantly aware of your thoughts, beliefs, emotions, and actions. It's about truly understanding who you are, how you act alone or around others, and how you make decisions. It's about developing who you really are versus who you are expected to be. Over time, consistence and practice develops your self-control.

I often tell people that there is a lesson that can be taken from every situation in life. Here's the honey that I managed to extract in a head full of buzzing memories.

When I was young, I attempted to put together

a model car, something that quickly became frustrating for me. If I took the steering wheel off the plastic mold, there would be an excess of plastic around the edges. Go figure — when you're aiming for sheer perfection, and consider all the components, creating a replica of fascination becomes less likely. When I laid all my pieces out in front of me and began putting it all together, I realized that the parts didn't always take the right shape or match up, and that it would have been an embarrassment to accept responsibility for this thing.

And then I watched my friend do it. He was fond of cars, and craftsmanship coursed through his veins. I remember watching him shave off the excess, treating each part with reverence, and assembling it better than any machine could today. Everything just seemed to click. Shock and awe would have been an understatement. The finished product made me realize that paying mind to the little things makes a world



of difference. The idea of exercising your self-awareness is tantamount: you are the vehicle, and by fine-tuning your thoughts and changing your mind, you are conditioning yourself to improve in all areas of your life to be the best that you can be.

The awareness of yourself comes with practice, time, and paying attention to patterns. The caring part — the part where you take action — is completely up to you.

You just need to pay attention to the details.

Self-analysis

Self-analysis develops your awareness and exercises the practice of paying attention to overlooked patterns. You are learning to filter out what is relevant and what is not. You become aware of your habits, behaviors, decisions, and thoughts.

At the end of each day, I sit down and analyze myself. It's kind of like interviewing yourself genuinely and with empathy. I think about all the

things I've said, done, and haven't done. I think about the times I felt frustration, the opportunities seized or potentially missed, and the times I've felt most challenged. I observe the times I felt joy or success, and the times I felt neutral or shy or speechless.

This practice is important because it allows you to become more aware of your actions and thoughts. If you aren't going to evaluate yourself and see where your mistakes are, then who will? Chances are, if there were someone who reminded you of your faults on a daily basis, you would strangle them. Is self-analysis only for pessimists? No, of course not. But for the purpose of developing your awareness, I find it best to start with anchors that have been tying you down since they are the easiest to avoid or overlook.

Think on it, physically write it out, and accept every aspect for what it is. Reflect back on a situation where you felt rage or joy. What was the cause, and how did you react? If your actions created an outcome that you didn't want, what could you have done differently the next time?



This exercise will shine a light on your behavior and habits that are taken for granted, and broken down so that you may become completely aware of them.

Here's an assignment:

Grab a pen and paper. Draw a line down the middle. On one side write your strengths; on the other write your weaknesses.

This will help you gain a better understanding through visualization.

The weak side, or improvement side, is **the area where you acknowledge and face the roadblocks that are prevalent in your life** — becoming easily frustrated, being selfish, binge eating, needless spending — whatever it may be, you have to acknowledge and own it. There is nothing to be upset about; my weaknesses outweighed my strengths 3 to 1. When you have these attributes written down, you become aware of them. You call your own bluff.

The next step is to take action immediately. Not later, not next week — right now. This can

start with a few minutes a day, because rapidly changing behavior and habits is no easy task. When you wake up tomorrow, you will have an awareness that wasn't there before. With this new awareness, your goal is to now start doing the opposite of your old behavior, little by little, whenever you can. Sure, sometimes you'll lose control; when you become aware of it, don't beat yourself up — just do better tomorrow.

A serious issue I had when I was younger was punctuality. No matter how hard I tried, I just couldn't make anything on time. Through this practice, I faced my weakness; I wrote it down and acknowledged that this was unfavorable behavior. I asked myself, "How does this issue become resolved, forever?" You should ask the same question when facing your own weaknesses or areas that need improvement.

If I had to get somewhere by a certain time, I would normally leave a half hour before — but this was never enough time. So, I began to make a conscious decision of arriving 15 to 30 minutes early. If I arrived early, I succeeded and was filled with the desire to continue this course of action. Did I fail from time to time? That's like asking if I



am human. Of course I was late every now and then, but over time, with mindful practice, that bad habit was resolved. The only downfall now is that everyone seems to be late and I always seem to be early, but that's neither here nor there.

Focus on your weaknesses and leverage your strengths. If one of your qualities is a strong work ethic, then harness its effectiveness; apply it to your weaknesses. Let your strengths help you resolve the issues on the improvement side. This is the process of mastery — control or superiority over someone or something, meaning yourself. Who cares if you have fewer strengths? As I said earlier, my strengths outweighed my weaknesses threefold. The joy of converting weaknesses over to strengths is more fulfilling than having more strengths to begin with. I'm serious.

Practicing self-analysis is tough to live up to — it's a reality check that feels more like a blow to the stomach. I know that people will be quick to say, "This is just the way I am." I was the type to say that, until I realized how much of an excuse that was for the fear of becoming a better version of myself. A person who stays the same for a prolonged period of their life is wasting daily

opportunities to forge themselves into something greater.

Some people call that life, I call that a sad story.

Self-defeat

Christmas 2011:

I woke up with a strange red dot on my arm.

The next day, more red bumps.

A week later:

From the top of my head, all around my face, down to my feet — I was covered in small, red, scaly teardrops.

"Guttate Psoriasis," said my dermatologist with a hopeless look on her face. No cure. No pill. No cream. Nothing. You could have held a gun to my head and told me to stop itching, but I wouldn't have been able to. Most nights I would cry myself to sleep, only to wake up in the morning around layers of my own dead skin. I wanted to be invisible. Pieces of my self-esteem shed with every flake. Imagine going from a crystal clear



complexion — being able to enjoy the beach or even a casual walk down the street — to hiding in your room, refusing to hang out with your closest friends, and avoiding the outside world like a recluse.

I was a pro when it came to self-defeating behavior; I would wake up with it, and it would cuddle up next to me when I went to bed.

Here's the cold-hard truth, though: I didn't have to hide. I didn't have to put my life on pause. I didn't have to surrender.

Ultimately, I defeated myself because it was easy. Because making excuses is easier than doing the work. I allowed self-defeating thoughts to wreck me. In essence, everything I did — from quitting the gym to not seeing my friends to convincing myself how horrible my life was — it was all a choice.

And that is exactly what self-defeat is: a choice.

The greatest ruler of the Roman Empire, Marcus Aurelius, once said:

“The mind is the ruler of the soul. It should remain unstirred by agitations of the flesh — gentle and violent ones alike. Not mingling with them, but fencing itself off and keeping those feelings in their place. When they make their way into your thoughts, through the sympathetic link between mind and body, don't try to resist the sensation. The sensation is natural. But don't let the mind start in with judgments, calling it ‘good’ or ‘bad.’”

Self-awareness came into play when my destructive behavior was at its peak. My dermatologist gave me two options: meditation and light therapy.

Meditation? Really?



When you can't beat 'em, join 'em. So I gave it a shot. I practiced meditation many times and became frustrated at first — I didn't know what I was doing. Sit still and breathe? No one ever taught me this...

I eventually got the hang of it, though. Whenever I looked at my hands or at myself in the mirror, negative thoughts swarmed in my mind. At those moments I meditated, took deep breaths, and told myself to just relax and calm down — things would get better. And it did. I also went to light therapy three times a week, altered my diet, and consumed this wretched green goo that looked and tasted like mud, which greatly contributed to the betterment of my condition. After a few months, I was able to change the voice in my head and pilot my life more mindfully. It became effortless to believe that I would get better. I started to exert my will in ways that I would have never imagined.

The Psoriasis faded, but the fear of it returning remains. The scars on my legs and arms remind me of a time that tested my willpower and the ability to stay positive — which I failed all too easily. I could view this time in my life as one

of the most unfortunate events, or view it as a time where I was able to overcome an obstacle and witness some of the greatest powers in life: the power of belief and the power of my own perception.

Note: I'm not saying meditation will cure everything. Who knows what the inside of my body was really doing? What I was able to do, however, was to take control of my thoughts and emotions. I became aware of what I was doing, and in turn, changed my perception to allow more positive thinking. What I simply did was change my mind.

Think about a situation that you're in that makes you feel stressed, uneasy, or irritated. What can you do, right now, to change your mind about it? I believe there are always two sides to a story. Which side of the story do you want to believe?



Mindful Motives:

- When exercising self-awareness, pay attention to the details. Analyze your behavior, habits, and decisions. Why do you say yes or no to certain things? How do you act around people you like or dislike? Become aware of who you are.
- Practice self-analysis. You will learn a great deal about yourself, where to start making improvements, and what your current strengths and weaknesses are. You also become aware of certain patterns that are easy to overlook.
- Becoming aware is a great opportunity. Don't dismiss it; harness it.
- Write everything out. Even with smartphones and apps, I always found post-its or a little notepad the most effective way of remembering thoughts and ideas.
- Self-defeat is a choice — your choice. What choices will you make today that will have an effect on the opportunities of tomorrow?



Chapter Two: “What do you want?”

“Everyone seems to have a clear idea of how other people should lead their lives, but none about his or her own.” — Paulo Coelho

Do you remember the conversation between Alice and the Cheshire cat in the story, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland? Let me give you a refresher:

“‘Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?’

‘That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,’ said the Cat.

‘I don’t much care where—’ said Alice.

‘Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,’ said the Cat.”

Then it doesn’t matter which way you go. Just think about that for a minute.

Until my own epiphany, I lived without goals, or at least never did what was necessary to complete them. I found myself with an overabundance of time, which I wasted recklessly.

Sure, anyone can just live comfortably day after day, but that’s easy and I personally don’t believe we’re built just for that. Occasionally, a certain question will come up that most people tend to avoid: “What do you want?”

This was a question that I was faced with when my father noticed I was veering off track. He pulled me to the side, and again, brought up the questions, “What is troubling you? What is it that you want?”

When faced with that question, I froze in place; I couldn’t even answer it. What did I want?



At the time, my young mind influenced by entertainment and television told me that I wanted fame and fortune. So my lips moved on their own and uttered, "Success."

My father asked, "Well, how does one get success?"

"Hard work, I guess," I said.

And then he schooled me on the idea of success, on being proud with who I am in what I do or create, doing something I truly love, starting something, working towards something. Setting goals and accomplishing them would be a form of success.

So it became more than evident that I needed to set goals, even if my goal was as simple as, "Start setting goals."

Without a sense of direction, life is like shooting at a target blindfolded. You might fire 10 shots and not hit once, or you might fire 10 shots and hit a few. Ultimately, you are in the mercy of "What if?" In essence, it is a lack of control. When you set goals, you aren't shooting blindfolded anymore.

You know what direction you're aiming at, as well as the target you're aiming for. You see the distance; you become aware.

For obvious reasons, your goals should be realistic and measurable. Realistic because, well, why aim for unrealistic? And measurable because you should be able to pat yourself on the back in increments as you work your way up to your ultimate goal. You should be able to say, "I want to remodel my room in 30 days." That's measurable and realistic. After your first week, see where you are. Did you get started? Halfway through the month, you should be able to congratulate yourself. This elicits a sense of accomplishment, reward, and purpose when you accomplish that goal; a feeling of success. You become hungry for more.

I'm not saying to create grandiose goals to get started. I happen to advocate the opposite: set small goals.

The Art of Small Goals

All too often, people tend to set extreme goals



because they want to challenge themselves or prove they are capable of accomplishing something difficult. But usually that enormous goal backfires, further resulting in frustration, quitting early, procrastination, self-defeat, etc.

I would set a goal to lose 50 pounds or to accomplish all my assignments in one sitting or complete a whole list of tasks in a few, short hours. Our bodies are similar to batteries: there will be a point where you run out of energy and need to recharge. It is wise to use your energy efficiently to yield the best possible results.

I soon realized that it is best to divide your goals into small, actionable steps; digest what you can and move on to the next meal.

Here's how:

1. It's important to be as specific as you can with your goal. If you want to lose weight, then set a limit that is realistic. Instead of aiming to lose 30 pounds in one month, aim to lose 15, maybe 10. Over-accomplish that goal, then adjust; if you fly past your expected goal, your confidence will skyrocket. Before you know it,

you're in the habit of exercising daily, eating healthy, and burning off that fat. Before you know it, you are 30 pounds lighter — all by doing it a few pounds at a time. It's like tricking your mind. All you're doing is changing the perspective of your willpower to achieve the same result. Apply the same mindset to other difficult tasks.

2. When trying to accomplish your goals, it's vital to focus on the steps that yield true value. I'll use the weight loss example again, but know that you can use this for any kind of goal; the idea is to break down your goals into simpler steps. Too often people stress themselves out about weight loss or going to the gym, but in actuality it's very simple: eat healthy, exercise daily, and get your 6-8 hours of sleep. Instead of making your goal to lose weight, make it so that your goal is to show up — to get your foot out of the door and into the gym or outdoors. This way, when you accomplish that small goal, you're developing the habit so it becomes natural; when you don't do it, you get this ominous feeling that you did something terribly wrong, like leaving the stove or toaster on. When you fortify the habit



of exercising daily, then weight loss becomes the result of your actions.

Pat yourself on the back. You deserve it. Give yourself accolades. Motivation can be found through your own actions.

Another short example: Think about how hard it is to open a book and finish it. Some people would rather sit and watch television for eight hours. Why?

Somewhere along the way they lost their ability to think for themselves and to create their own visualizations off literature. When you read, you're able to interpret and understand on a different level of how your mind functions. When you're watching television, you're being told what to think; reading exercises the ability to think for yourself through visualization.

I used to be like this for nearly all of my life. Besides the Harry Potter series, I never read a book after that. Reading has been one of the habits that I wish I did when I was younger because I attribute my growth and understanding of difficult concepts to the amount of books I devour now.

Simply put, I would not be here today writing this book if it weren't for reading, challenging, and educating myself.

I want you to try this:

1. Grab a book that you're interested in reading.
2. Dedicate yourself everyday to read an X amount of pages; I started with 50 pages, but you can do as little or as much as you'd like. Or, start with one chapter per day. Implement the art of small goals. Once you finish that chapter, close the book. Boom. You just accomplished your daily goal. You started developing the habit. Congratulations. Keep it going!
3. Before you know it, after a week or two, depending on how long the book is, you will have completed a whole book. Reading has profound effects on your brain; similar to exercising your body, reading exercises your mind. Both are required to living a mindful and fruitful life.



This is what I mean by the art of small goals. Stop focusing on the top of the ladder; focus on the bottom steps that help you reach the top. Each rung is a goal, and without taking it one step at a time, you will not get very far. Applying this mindset makes accomplishing your goals less daunting and more adventurous.

There is much truth behind the saying, “No pain, no gain.” Staying focused on you, your goals and what’s most pivotal to you, is at times painful. What makes you great is being able to pay no mind to distractions and to stay focused. Ask yourself: What does lending mind to distractions and meaningless tasks have to do with the attainment of my endeavors? Nothing. So you must move past it. Stick to what’s essential.

How to Treat Your Goals

Have you ever noticed police officers on horseback? If you look carefully, you’ll notice the horse is equipped with all kinds of accessories. One that I have in mind: the blinders on the side of its eyes.

Horses have a wide peripheral vision; in short, they can be easily distracted. These blinders are put on to reduce their peripherals so they only focus on what is in front of them.

Treat your goals in the same manner.

The horse only sees what’s in front of it — its goal, its destination, its path. You need to be like that horse; you need to have those blinders that block out any distractions. You are here; your goal is there. Do what is required to the best of your ability, no matter how small or big of steps it requires, and get to your goal.

By maintaining your sense of direction, you can be aware of what is most relevant to you. When losing your sense of direction, it becomes hard to differentiate what is important and what isn’t; you invite mindlessness and become exposed to negative influences.

You know as much as I do how fast time goes by. Start this now, and a year from now, maybe two, you’ll look back at when you first started and smile. This is about getting started on something so that you can create a sense of purpose and



direction in your life. Practicing self-analysis will remind you to look back and see the distance you have traveled, the footprints that you left behind, with each one telling a story. Be proud of your accomplishments. When reflecting on your journey, the way a mother reminisces her child's first day of school, I guarantee you will be in awe in how far you've come — and how much further you will go.

Mindful Motives:

- Don't focus on the top of the ladder; focus on the rungs that help you reach the top.
- Without goals, your actions will be insignificant. Stop scattering bricks everywhere; start placing them together to build something everlasting.
- Accomplish your goals, and then set new ones.
- Being bored is easy. Working your face off to build the life you desire is hard work. Make the choice.
- Setting goals helps you understand what's important to you and what's not. Without goals, it's hard to differentiate progress from procrastination.



Chapter Three: Burst Emotions and The Pause

“You don’t have to turn this into something. It doesn’t have to upset you. Things can’t shape our decisions by themselves.”

— Marcus Aurelius

When you let negative emotions overcome you, they render you unperceptive of your actions. When unperceptive, your actions tend to cause more harm to yourself and others. This is the foundation of a self-defeating lifestyle.

Take a moment to examine a situation — look at it for what it is, break it down, and acknowledge the contributing factors — what is it that is creating this emotion inside of you? What is the difference between your emotions and your goal? Let this shed light on where your energy should be invested. In no way, shape, or form are your rants, raves, loss of focus, and disregard

for self-awareness beneficial to your progress. It is factually stupid. Why waste your energy on anything other than achieving your goals and living a fulfilling life? Why add needless suffering?

It’s time to understand that we defeat ourselves by lending mind to unnecessary provocations.

Three points discussed in this chapter:

1. Burst emotions
2. The Pause

What are burst emotions?

They are the immediate influx of emotions, whether positive or negative, that are felt when something unexpected occurs.

Example: A person cuts you off without using his or her blinker. A troll on your feed. A glass of



red wine tips over onto your fresh, new pants. When you're criticized, even after giving your best effort.

What happens when these situations occur? Do you hear that voice inside that is telling you to react — to flip out, lose control? How many times have you been successful on reacting on those burst emotions? Did it ruin your day? Stress you out? Cause you to light up a cigarette? These are burst emotions, and more times than none, they lure you into self-sabotage.

Many times, people act out of burst emotions because it is easy to — because it is an unbroken habit. When your ego is under attack, you will feel the need to defend yourself. But what are you really trying to prove?

One of the greatest habits you can develop today requires you to ask yourself one question in every situation that you're in:

Is what I'm doing effective?

If you can ask yourself this in the middle of an

argument or complaint, then cheers to you. You've suddenly become aware, while the other person continues to squander their time and energy.

The Pause

Sure, you can act on your emotions and hopefully win: that's called gambling.

Emotions vary in terms and usage, so let me clear things up. I'm not saying to never act on positive emotions such as love, empathy, or compassion — empathy and compassion is what makes us human, separates us from animals, and allows us to connect with one another. When two people decide to have a child, love, in most cases, is the foundation of that decision. Yes, it is still a gamble because you don't know what will happen until it happens. You cannot control the outcome.

What I'm more focused on is when you make unconscious decisions, such as complaining, yelling, procrastinating, etc. To become aware of what you're doing is a great opportunity; you should never dismiss that awareness or hold



it off for another time. It is an opportunity to change what is ineffective. It is an opportunity to do better.

When an alcoholic owns their disease, they become aware. This sudden awareness is a window to redefining oneself. It's hard work, but I know one thing to be true about something that's hard: it's usually worth doing.

By understanding burst emotions, and how they influence you to act swiftly without any regard of consequences, you exercise your self-awareness and negate any possible distractions. This habit alone can solve many problems in life, relationships, and business. You learn to pause before reacting.

That pause can make a world of a difference in the outcomes you create.

Mindful Motives:

- Awareness must be harnessed, not overlooked.
- Everyday you make a ton of choices. Make the ones that don't repeat the same negative outcomes as before.
- Remove burst emotions from your decisions.
- Don't let your ego get in the way. Focus on what matters.
- Remember the pause.
- Be mindful when making a decision. Pause first.
- Some of the most difficult things in life are the ones worth doing.



Chapter Four: Abandoning Self-Defeat

“If my mind can conceive it, and my heart can believe it — then I can achieve it.” — Muhammad Ali

One day a man injured himself during his morning exercise. He had damaged his sacral nerve in his back, resulting in a six month sentence to a hospital bed. His doctors told him that he would never be able to continue living his life as a martial artist and actor.

Known for pushing his body to the limit, he refused to believe that he would be unable to walk out of the hospital on his own or abandon his life's calling. He was not the type to lie around; but the doctors relentlessly told him to give up. Instead of channeling his energy solely on physical strength, he focused on his mind, studied from great teachers in philosophy, and with the help of his wife, had his thoughts written down into a book.

He refused to defeat himself. He refused to embrace ridicule and failure. He made a choice.

He proved the doctors wrong and went on to star in four and a half more films from 1971 to 1973. Much of the styles you see today are most likely rooted from his teachings. He is revered by many as one of the most respected martial artists of our time.

You have probably heard of this man. His name was Bruce Lee.

Self-defeat — as you and I now know too well — is inevitably a choice.

“I can't.”

“It's impossible.”

“I don't have the time.”

Do any of these excuses sound familiar? That is



the voice of self-defeat. Nothing is impossible. Humans have done an incredible job at widening the boundaries of what seems impossible. When an amputee starts running marathons, I can't help but be inspired by their perseverance, dedication, and the ability to overcome exceptions. So what's really stopping you? The answer is your mind, your thoughts. And that's something you can change today.

The choice has always been in your hands.

You can choose to be your own person and build your life towards success; or you can opt to defeat yourself, make up excuses, and never realize your true potential.

This chapter is dedicated to the abandonment of self-defeat.

Perception is Reality

Your perception is your reality. If you embrace ridicule, embarrassment, and shame, then you yield those results. Change your mind to change your life. It's overlooked but it's that simple. Think about a child who is scared of three-headed

monsters bursting out of the closet. To them, this notion is very real because they believe it's possible.

But is it likely?

Emotionally overcharged doubts that you possess are no less ridiculous than the fear of three-headed monsters bursting out of the closet.

Lending Mind to Distractions

Frustration. Rage. Jealousy. Procrastinating.

What is it all for? How do those emotions and fruitless behaviors bring you closer to achieving your goals or living life fully?

To feel and act on these emotions seems natural, but don't buy that. The choice to act on these emotions have been indoctrinated in our minds from a young age. It can be argued that mass media or the environment is to blame, but whatever the circumstances, it is our responsibility to make decisions best suited to the forward progression of our lives.



Shatter Your Comfort Zone

For most of my life, I was comfortable. I woke up, did the same thing every day. Life was easy. I didn't have any goals and couldn't identify what I wanted to do with my life. For this, no one but I was responsible.

I felt like what I was doing was abnormal for my age — even though some would disagree. Instead of growing and progressing, my potential was decaying. I was defeating myself by being unaware of what I was doing, or accepting responsibility for my actions.

We are built to learn, to experience life, to stand out, and to contribute something to this world. That's what potential is.

Hunter S. Thompson said it best:

“Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming “Wow! What a Ride!”

When I started becoming aware of myself, when I found the desire to initiate something, I went out and failed forward. If you stop to think for a minute, it is possible to fail in two different ways: one is by letting failure defeat you, the other is by learning from it and progressing.

Temple Grandin, a personal hero of mine, exemplifies the behavior of shattering your comfort zone and failing forward. She was diagnosed with autism at the age of two, which constrained her ability to speak and express herself with other kids in school; she was bullied



and called “tape recorder” because she often repeated what she said.

Her heightened sense of emotion made her feel threatened by everything around her, of being repudiated and disregarded as a normal person. This led to her invention of what she called the “squeeze machine”, a device that helped her and other individuals like her relax. All of her obstacles would eventually inspire her work in animal welfare, specifically in the handling of livestock. After observing the highly inefficient and nearly barbaric ways that cattle were being treated before being processed, she designed a system known today as sweeping curved corrals, which reduces the stress level of the animals, and provides for a more suitable environment for the livestock being led to slaughter.

She overcame the criticisms and roadblocks in her life and went on to graduate from Franklin Pierce College for her bachelor’s in Psychology in 1970, a master’s in animal science from Arizona State University in 1975, a doctoral degree in animal science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1989. Dr. Grandin had an award-winning documentary made based on her

life, hit the Time’s 100 most influential people in the world under the “Heroes” category, and received two honorary doctorates from two different universities. She continues to be a leading advocate for animal welfare and autism.

Learning from my heroes and other inspirational figures, I noticed one pattern:

Those who succeed relentlessly shatter their comfort zone.

It’s not the kind of comfort where you work your whole life to achieve, like a steady income and a nice home with a paid-off mortgage, but the kind that extinguishes your appetite and desire for greatness. When we become too comfortable, we slowly lose our hunger. When a fire has nothing else to burn, it dies out. When someone switches their career or job, many times it’s because they aren’t learning or being challenged — they are comfortable, and that can sometimes be boring. I don’t think life is about being comfortable; life must consist of challenges and learning experiences. That’s what makes everyday worthwhile. That’s what you must do to



keep your internal fire burning.

Although there isn't an instruction manual to guarantee success, this one sentence may be the closest we ever get. Fear should be used as a trigger: a sign to do it, rather than cower away from it.

So let me ask you, what will you do today that will slowly expand or shatter your comfort zone?

In a seminar that I attended, Seth Godin told this story:

“Picture this: A kid climbs a ladder onto a diving board. He looks down and feels fear; the voice in his head is saying no way. He doesn't want to jump, but he also can't climb down. After contemplating for some time, he finally plunges off the diving board and into the pool.

And what happens next? He gets out of the water and jumps again.”

Moral of the story: When you face what you fear, you realize you can handle more than you think. Hell, you may even enjoy it.

You can be like that kid again. You can start playing the way a child does. You can expand your comfort zone, seduce your fear, and all with a smile on your face.

Failures may be hard to brush off, but the real challenge and reward is learning from them.

You just need to keep moving forward.

Gifts, Attitude, and Skill

In July 2012, Seth Godin — an influential author, speaker, and a person who fundamentally changed me as a person — held a three-day seminar and handpicked 20 students to join him in his office. I was one of those students.

On the first day, we discussed gifts, attitude, and skills.

He asked us, “What traits would you want in a potential employee? Shout them out.”

The students and I shouted out things like:



honesty, appearance, passion, vulnerability, social awareness, responsibility, strong work ethic, and motivation.

Then we had to divide this long list into categories: gifts, attitudes, or skills.

Traits like appearance and passion were considered to be gifts. But responsibility, vulnerability, and honesty? As the list narrowed down, it became harder to differentiate between attitude and skill. This is what we learned:

An attitude is developed through the consistent practice of the skill. Focus on practicing the skill so you can develop the attitude. If you want your attitude to reflect honesty or responsibility, then you must practice the skill of being honest or responsible.

Of course, trying these new skills will, at times, result in failure. So let's discuss failure.

The Facts of Failure

"Successful people are successful for one simple

reason: they think about failure differently." — Seth Godin

1. Failure is not fatal. It's the greatest way to learn about yourself and the arena you're playing in.
2. You have two choices: learn from it and adapt, or let it unman you.
3. You will probably fail more times than you succeed — when you do succeed, however, it's going to be bliss.

Every success story has a trail of failures behind it. When you overcome the fear of failing, you give yourself permission to succeed.

Fear and Tango

In Seth's seminar, I learned a lesson that changed the way I view fear. How? I became aware of where it all starts and how it plays a part in our lives. I want to share this lesson.

The amygdala — what some psychologists refer to as the lizard brain — are two little almond-shaped bits deep within the medial temporal



lobes of the brain, responsible for fear, arousal, and emotional response.

Fear is the underlying factor in not exerting the will to change one's life. It's much easier to take a pill and numb your emotions; it's much more difficult to believe that it all starts with your mind, and then your actions.

When we feel danger, our lizard brain takes over. It wants us to be comfortable and survive because that's the purpose it served throughout time. It doesn't want us to take a risk that may potentially harm us. The lizard brain doesn't want change. When animals realize their environment is changing, their brain tells them to adapt to something different, something much safer; that's a positive reaction because for the animal that means life or death.

For humans, life has become much less about physical survival and more about mental survival. When you start to become self-aware and implement changes in your routine, you will feel that same fear, that resistance. In this case, however, you must perceive this as an irrational fear that must be silenced. Many times, people stop their pursuit and go back to their old ways

of being lazy or fearful. The ones who break through that paralysis end up experiencing a life that once didn't seem possible.

You cannot put fear in a headlock, but you can tango with it and tire it out. You can develop the attitude of being fearless by exercising your initiative — trying something different, new, or daring. You can train yourself to realize that taking the risk won't kill you, and instead, will teach you a lot about yourself.

The ancient powers of the lizard brain are what hold you back from being who you want to be.

Once you identify your fears, you are left with two options: to do what is easy or what is difficult.

Easy versus Hard

Criticizing someone is easy. Empathizing is an undervalued skill.

Judging someone is reflexive. Being open-minded, is at times, difficult.



Being bored and staying the same is safe. Finding the desire to be better than yesterday is taxing. Looking someone in the eye and starting a conversation might cause your palms to sweat. Staring at your phone and not saying much has become a popular habit.

The difference between doing what's easy versus what is hard is a fine line.

The outcomes are obvious. The question is, which one do you really want for yourself?

Mindful Motives:

- Like Bruce Lee, we can make a choice to do what is difficult. Or we can stay in our bed for 6 months and complain about it.
- Your perception is your reality. Common wisdom is not always common practice.
- Fear can be seduced. It can be used as a sign to do something, rather than cower away from it.
- Pick an attitude to develop the skill.
- Failure is not fatal. Play until you win.
- Doing something easy has its rewards, but so does doing something difficult. The experience is the reward, it's just a matter of whether you want it or not.
- There are the things that matter and the things that don't. Once you become aware of what does, which one will you focus on?



Chapter Five: True Potential

“Always dream and shoot higher than you know you can do. Do not bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors. Try to be better than yourself.”
— William Faulkner

If you are an avid reader of self-help or personal development books and blogs, you may often hear the term true potential. In my experience, this is usually something dismissed as unattainable or hippy-bullshit.

Although many people may feel this way, it doesn't mean it has to be true for you. I think the term is quite fascinating. It describes our capacity as humans — to be the best that we can be.

I believe this to be a timely message in a world filled with chaos and people who sell themselves

short. Too many people settle for comfort — and if that's what you want, then more power to you — but I cannot be persuaded to believe that that's all you're meant for. Everyday is an opportunity to be better than yesterday.

Everyday I try to be a better me. Even after writing this book, it serves as a reminder to focus on an undervalued, sometimes overlooked aspect in life. I try not to make the same decisions from yesterday that were based off anger, frustration, and stress. Why? Because the result from making mindless decisions squanders our true potential of being a better person, living better lives, and treating one another with a mutual respect. When making those kinds of decisions, we fabricate needless stress and develop fruitless habits.

Self-improvement

Self-improvement has a multitude of preconceived notions of being lame or futile. Why is this?



Let's get this out of the way: There is nothing wrong with settling for average; but if you can be the best at it, why not, right? There is nothing wrong with the pursuit of improving yourself, bad habits, and behavior. By doing so, you become more productive, build better relationships, and live a more prolific life. Those who try to interject their biases onto you about the path of self-improvement are either scared, have failed, or have never picked themselves up. Don't let the opinions of others cross over to your realm and influence how you want to live your life.

"Oh, self-help books are worthless — they are all the same thing."

It is true that these self-help books have similar goals: to become better human beings. Many times, it doesn't work for someone because it takes a tremendous amount of sacrifice, desire, and willpower. As an avid reader of self-help books, a lot of what I read seemed like common sense; everything was another perspective, another door, another moment to make you go, "Ah-ha, I didn't think of it that way; I should try that." But how often are people putting that knowledge into practice? Not often enough.

If the saddest thing in life is wasted talent, then the second saddest thing is self-defeat.

There is one mindset I know to be helpful for developing your true potential, and it is this:

Strive to be better than yesterday.

Mindful Motives:

- Everyday is an opportunity to be better than yesterday.
- Don't seek to be comfortable, in the sense of lazy or fearful. Seek challenges. Set and accomplish milestones.
- You have true potential — to be the best that you can be. You can develop it to reach new limits. But here's the catch: you can't be comfortable while doing it. Are you still up for the challenge?



Chapter Six: N.M.E.

October 14, 1912 — two men woke up that day with a purpose: one of them to deliver a speech, the other to kill the man delivering it.

The would-be-assassin had stalked the man all the way from New York to Wisconsin, waiting patiently until he had his moment to draw his .32 caliber pistol, aim it at his target, and shoot him through the chest.

Most commonly referred to as the Bull Moose, the speaker was Theodore Roosevelt; the shooter was John Schrank.

Schrank's reason: "any man looking for a third term ought to be shot." He also stated that the ghost of William McKinley — the president that was assassinated and where Teddy Roosevelt served his first term right after — came and told him to avenge his death.

The .32 caliber bullet went through Roosevelt's

glasses case, and through a 50-page single-folded copy of his speech, failing to mortally wound him. Roosevelt, an experienced hunter and anatomist, quickly concluded that since he was not coughing up blood, the bullet did not penetrate his chest cavity into his lungs, and so declined to be rushed to the hospital.

With blood seeping into his shirt, he pulled out the torn, bloodstained speech from his vest pocket, and said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I don't know whether you fully understand that I have just been shot; but it takes more than that to kill a Bull Moose."

He stayed on that stage for 90 minutes and delivered his speech. Afterwards, he was rushed to the hospital and found that the bullet penetrated three inches into his chest, and was told that it would be life-threatening to remove it.



Roosevelt carried the bullet with him for the rest of his life.

Even after being shot, he still lost the election to Woodrow Wilson. Roosevelt was an adventurer, so after his loss, he led an expedition to the Amazon jungles, only to be afflicted with a deadly disease, and died at the age of 60. By scholars, he is considered to be one of the greatest U.S. presidents. This story only exemplifies a fraction of his accomplishments.

Thinking about this story and realizing how determined Roosevelt was, it makes you wonder: What will it take to stop me from accomplishing my objectives today? My goals. My reason for being here, alive, healthy, and breathing.

What will it take to stop you? From pursuing your dreams, accomplishing your goals, and living your life the way you desire?

Will it take a near-death experience to wake you up, to make you realize that there are more important things to be done than squandering your time and efforts in meaningless tasks?

Will you pull out some excuse like you always have? Will you shy away because it's the easier thing to do?

We can all learn something from Teddy Roosevelt: He woke up that day knowing he had to give a speech — whether he was going to be shot probably never crossed his mind.

But it happened. And it was unexpected.

Instead of cowering in fear, losing control and withdrawing from his goals, he kept his composure. He was focused on delivering that speech because that was his goal that day: to win the hearts of his audience and to show his aptitude in leadership.

Whether you live or die today is undetermined. But there will be extraneous, unforeseen elements that interfere with your life. Whether you choose to allow them to stop you or not is completely up to you. It's a choice; an action that speaks volumes.



The one question you should ask yourself every morning is: What will it take to stop me from doing what I must?

Cicero once said, “Man is his own worst enemy.” That couldn’t be anymore true. As I said earlier, self-defeat is a choice — your choice. Obstructing yourself or others is a choice. Not living to your full potential and denying your soul’s calling is a choice. Not accomplishing your goals and living like a zombie is a choice.

By exercising self-awareness and finding the desire to become greater than you are, you will almost naturally abandon self-defeat and create the life you deserve to live. You don’t have to live with self-defeat. Fear? Fear will always be there; if you live, you fear. It’s how you use fear that turns you into a champion. Let it propel you forward. Redefine yourself by facing your fears and stepping out of your comfort zone. The continuity of these actions will forge you into something that you never thought possible.

Go. Start with self-awareness; become aware of yourself, your behaviors, thoughts, habits, and how you make decisions. Pause before reacting and stop burst emotions in their place — don’t let

them cross over to your field and affect who you are. Abandon self-defeat to slowly develop your true potential. Setting goals and accomplishing them can be a start to finding your purpose and receiving a sense of accomplishment. Living a fulfilling and meaningful life is a choice, a choice that may not have seemed possible because of all the excuses and distractions that you started to believe in.

I respectfully called bullshit on all of that, and now its time for you to do the same.

I titled this chapter “N.M.E.,” for No More Excuses.

Mindful Motives:

- When you wake up in the morning, ask yourself: What will it take to stop me from doing what I must?
- Excuses are easy to make. You’ve made plenty of them. If you start doing the opposite today, can you continue it tomorrow? And the next day? It’s a tough challenge, but it comes with unbelievable rewards.



My Final Words to You

As I reminisce my journey, I realize how much potential I've squandered by being comfortable and self-defeating. The change from the old me to the new me wasn't instant, but rather a slow, tedious process where I've learned and adapted to new lessons on the way. Perseverance is the hand on my back that slowly edges me forward, reminding me that the rewards of this journey are greater than any gift anyone can receive. Although my life has felt like it has begun again, it gives me hope to know how much more I can potentially grow and learn. I wrote this book not only to help others live up to their true potential and become self-aware, but to also remind myself of the person I once was, and the person that I am slowly becoming. George Bernard Shaw brilliantly said, "Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself." What a divine and true statement to the fullest extent.

Everyday you write a page in a book. Every year you finish a chapter and begin a new one. By taking the steps to becoming self-aware, accepting responsibility for your actions, and abandoning self-defeat, you will become a force unmatched to fire, whose spark will spread like a wildfire to all those who cross your path, and light the way for all those that are lost.

Nothing can stop you.

Never forget that.



Three things I want you to do

1. Send this book to a friend or someone you know who could use it. Reignite them. If you want to tweet it, [click here](#).
2. Email me at Paul@motivatedmastery.com and let me know what you think. I want to hear from you. I read and respond to all emails.
3. Come visit my blog [Motivated Mastery](#) for more of my writing, ideas, and future projects. This is the place to find me.

Thank you for reading.



Acknowledgements

Behind every writer, there are usually a world of helpful, passionate, and unselfish comrades.

Here are mine:

Big thanks to Brandon Reis — my editor, advisor, best friend, and someone who sat side by side with me to meticulously edit and reconstruct this book to perfection. Thank you Eddie Guadalupe — best friend, advisor, and for being there since the dawn of this long journey. I am so grateful for Laura Sly, my designer, for her patience, creativity, and remarkable work on the design and formatting.

Thanks to Julien Smith for helping me along the way, and for being the first person to tell me to start over. Thank you Idil for always being there and supporting me. I have to thank my crew of impresarios from Seth's seminar: Michelle Welsch, Jess Pillmore, and Kristina Villarini, for taking the time to read my drafts and provide

honest feedback. Thank you Simba Rousseau for always supporting and being real with me. And thank you Seth Godin, for giving me the opportunity to learn from you, as well as instilling in me the desire to complete and ship this book.

Much love to my family, friends, and my tribe that support my work and blog. I wouldn't be able to do what I do, or be where I am, if it weren't for the people in my life that inspired and motivated me to keep moving forward.

